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May 19, 2021

Law School News

Adjunct Professor of the Year 2021: David Coombs

As a seasoned JAG and private defense attorney, Coombs has represented countless soldiers (most prominently Wikileaks defendant PFC Chelsea Manning). As an adjunct professor at RWU Law, his classes have yielded many grateful alumni — but is he really the GOAT-A? Read on...

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David Coombs: Adjunct Professor of the Year 2021

[David Coombs](#), Roger Williams University School of Law's Chief Justice Weisberger Visiting Professor of Law, has been voted by the Class of 2021 as Adjunct Professor of the Year!

An internationally respected trial attorney and expert on military law, Professor Coombs has been a popular fixture at RWU Law since 2014. He teaches criminal procedure and coaches the RWU Trial Team, while also serving as the faculty advisor to the Military Law Society.

“We are so fortunate to have Professor Coombs serving as our law school’s Weisburger Visiting Professor,” said Dean Gregory W. Bowman. “He brings a wealth of legal practice experience and expertise into the classroom, including from his service in the U.S. Army JAG Corps and as a faculty member at the U.S. Army JAG Legal Center and School. Our students benefit enormously from his knowledge and his dedication to their learning, and I am glad to see him honored by this award for the second year in a row.”

For his part, Professor Coombs, who also received this honor in 2017, 2018 and 2020 — and whose wife, [Professor Tanya Monestier](#), was voted Professor of the Year in 2018 — was appreciative of the class's decision.

“I am honored to have been selected Adjunct Professor of the Year,” he said. “I love teaching at RWU Law. I enjoy getting to know all the different students, and feeling like I make an impact, however small, in their lives.”

Outside the classroom, Professor Coombs has often appeared in the news, both nationally and worldwide, as the lead defense counsel in the highly publicized case of [United States v. Manning](#), the soldier who provided classified information to Wikileaks. [Professor Coombs continued to represent PFC Manning](#) until her release from military prison in 2017, after President Obama commuted her sentence ([that commutation order](#) now hangs in Coombs' home office). [Coombs had argued passionately](#) for the commutation.

He is also in demand as a speaker on national security law, classified information, military courts-martial, freedom of the press, and gender dysphoria rights. He has also spoken on national security law, classified information, military courts-martial, freedom of the press, and gender dysphoria rights at universities and on national and international media programs.

Prior to joining the RWU faculty, Coombs served for more than 13 years on active duty in the U.S. Army JAG Corps, prosecuting and defending over 130 cases. As a defense counsel, he achieved numerous acquittals and tried several high profile cases for the Army. For example, he served as the Army’s first senior capital defense counsel and tried the death penalty case of [United States v. SGT Hasan K. Akbar](#).

In 2006, Coombs became a professor at the U.S. Army JAG Legal Center and School in Charlottesville, Va. There he taught evidence, capital litigation, high profile cases, trial advocacy, criminal procedure and criminal law. While on faculty, Professor Coombs was selected to deploy to Iraq in support of the Law and Order Task Force in Baghdad as a judicial advisor in 2008. In that position, he mentored and assisted 16 Iraqi prosecutors and 27 investigative judges to help build essential Iraqi capacity for independent, evidence-based and transparent adjudication of cases. He also developed and implemented a case management system that allowed the Baghdad court to track, monitor and manage its caseload of more than 1,600 criminal cases.

Following his return to the U.S., Professor Coombs transitioned from the active duty military to the reserves, serving for five years as a reserve judge advocate. He also established a successful military criminal defense practice, representing U.S. Army soldiers around the world. Having served in the Army for 22 years, he retired in 2018 as a Lieutenant Colonel. .

Through more than 17 years of military service, Professor Coombs received seven Meritorious Service Medals, the Army Commendation Medal, the Army Achievement Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, the Army Service Ribbon, and the Overseas Service Ribbon.

Professor Coombs received his B.A. from the University of Idaho, his J.D. from the University of Idaho School of Law, and his LL.M from the U.S. Army Judge Advocate General's School.